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Atari Online News, Etc.
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Dana P. Jacobson, Publisher/Managing Editor
Joseph Mirando, Managing Editor
Rob Mahlert, Associate Editor

Atari Online News, Etc. Staff

Dana P. Jacobson -- Editor
Joe Mirando -- "People Are Talking"
Michael Burkley -- "Unabashed Atariophile"
Albert Dayes -- "CC: Classic Chips"
Rob Mahlert -- Web site
Thomas J. Andrews -- "Keeper of the Flame"

With Contributions by:

Fred Horvat

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->From the Editor's Keyboard

"Saying it like it is!"

Well, we survived the snowstorm earlier in the week! It didn't turn out to be the big storm that was initially forecast; and it warmed up fairly quickly so the snow that we did get melted fairly quickly. Now if we can only warm those temperatures back up again, I'll be even more happy!

Presidential election politics! Just when you thought that things couldn't get more bizarre (but not really believing that!), the candidates continue to find another hand from which another glove comes off! Early on, one could find some humor in much of the antics going on among all of the candidates, but it's gone beyond that now. The rest of the world must certainly feel some embarrassment toward us these days! What also bothers me about a lot of this is that I honestly believe much of it is contrived to generate negativity and other issues - by the candidates and/or their staff/supporters. When will things get serious in this campaign? I guess time will tell!

A lot of this week's issue pertains to quite a bit of news regarding "retro-gaming" and the like. Some really interesting stuff - especially to those of us who were weaned on Atari in its infancy some 40 years or so ago! Wow, has it been THAT long?! We hope that you enjoy it, along with the rest of the issue.

Until next time...

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FireBee Update News

By Fred Horvat

With last weeks installment I discussed N.AES being patched to run on the FireBee. One thing I neglected to say was that N.AES is still available for purchase or so the seller's Web Site says. To purchase N.AES you can get it here : <http://woller.com/n.aes.html>

Also someone else was having the same issues I was with EasyMiNT not installing on their FireBee from a SD Card. Their solution that worked was to copy the EasyMiNT installer to the CF Card and install EasyMiNT directly off the CF Card you are installing to. Since I have three partitions on the CF Card I want to install on this will not be a problem. I do wish to install EasyMiNT on the FireBee to get SpareMiNT and its Unix capability on my FireBee.

MiNT Binutils, GDB and GCC on GitHub

Hello.

I have put the m68k-atari-mint cross-tools on GitHub.

<https://github.com/vinrivierte/m68k-atari-mint-binutils-gdb>
<https://github.com/vinrivierte/m68k-atari-mint-gcc>

I have imported *all* the available sources and patches, including:

- full history of the original GNU sources (!)
- Frank Naumann's original patches for GCC 2.95.3
- Patrice Mandin's patches for GCC 3.x
- all my own patches from GCC 3.2.3 to 4.7.1
- and also binutils and GDB

The advantages of GitHub are:

- 1) It is a Git repository. It can store the sources efficiently, and gives easy access to the whole history.
- 2) It has a nice web interface. Anyone can easily see what changed between patches, or compare any file version.
- 3) It allows anyone to clone or fork the repositories, in order to easily work on the sources, and maybe contribute.

Before that, working on the patches was a real pain. The sources are huge. When I published a new patch, it was virtually impossible to see what had changed. It was also impossible to get previous patches and learn from the history. And very difficult to contribute.

Now everything should be easy!
I hope this will help to go forward together.

The sources are organized in many branches, to follow official releases.

For example, gcc-4_6-branch is the official GNU branch, while the MiNT patches are located on the gcc-4_6-mint branch. And so on. I have included as much information as possible in the commit messages, including original authors, dates, changelogs, and bugtracker links. My whole knowledge is there.

I have also included preliminary and unreleased work, including:
- all my patches on GCC 3.x since 2003, based on Patrice Mandin's

original patch for GCC 3.0.1 (thanks again to him for having published his work!)

- my patch for binutils 2.25, ready for 1 year
- my patch for gdb 7.0, almost ready for 3 years (without gdbserver)
- my patch for GCC 4.7.1, ready for 4 years
- and a few other goodies

Next step will be to upgrade the binutils to 2.26.

Enjoy!

--
Vincent Rivière

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Halo 5: Guardians Massive Co-op Battles!

Nintendo Wii U Isn't Getting Canned, Yet!
Atari Vault Launches With 100 Games!
And much, much more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Halo 5: Guardians Will Get Massive Co-op Battles
With Warzone Firefight Multiplayer

Halo 5: Guardians is getting a big new multiplayer feature dubbed Warzone Firefight, which will enable teams of up to eight players to work cooperatively against huge waves of enemies.

Announced yesterday during the Halo World Championship Finals, the new content from Microsoft and 343 Industries combines the Warzone mode of massive battles in Halo 5 with Firefight, a popular mode from the 2009 game, Halo 3: ODST. Microsoft hopes the new mode will help retain players and inject new life into Halo 5: Guardians, which debuted last fall. Before Halo 5's launch, the Halo series had sold more than 65 million units since 2001 and generated more than \$4.6 billion in sales at retail for Microsoft.

In this mode, the enemy A.I. attacks in increasingly powerful waves for five rounds. Players can use the requisition system from Warzone to gain new capabilities such as weapons, armor, or vehicles during the fighting. And Warzone Firefight will introduce

a new class of Mythic bosses to make the challenge harder.

Warzone Firefight is set to debut during the summer.

Nintendo Wii U Isn't Getting Canned Yet

Nintendo is sticking by its poorly selling console.

Are the Nintendo Wii U's days numbered?

There's some controversy in Japan over whether the gaming company will stop production on its Wii U. Earlier on Wednesday, Japanese news outlet Nikkei reported that Nintendo was halting production on the Wii U, implying that it was deciding instead to focus on software and its follow-up hardware platform, the NX. Soon after, a Nintendo spokesperson spoke to another Japanese news outlet, IT Media, saying that the report was inaccurate and that from the next quarter and thereafter as well, Wii U production would continue.

While Nintendo's reported response seems to have put the issue to bed, it highlights an important issue for the company: Exactly what to do with the Wii U.

Nintendo launched its Wii U console in 2012 after coming off the wildly successful Wii. The console features better graphical capabilities than its predecessor, as well as a controller that delivers dual-screen functionality.

While the feature seemed appealing to some, the Wii U got off to a slow start that it never overcame. Nintendo revealed earlier this year that it had sold just 12.6 million units worldwide by the end of 2015 and acknowledged that sales were relatively stagnant. Meanwhile, its top two competitors, Sony's PlayStation 4 and Microsoft's Xbox One, which both launched well after the Wii U, have easily surpassed Nintendo's console in total sales. Sony, for instance, said that it had sold nearly 36 million PlayStation 4 consoles worldwide by the end of 2015. The console's success puts it on pace to be one of the most popular of all time.

Meanwhile, the Wii U has floundered, forcing Nintendo to perhaps prematurely announce that it was working on new hardware, currently codenamed NX. The company has also moved into mobile apps, though its first attempt in that arena stumbled out of the gate.

Those issues, coupled with Nikkei's strong, reliable track record in covering the Japanese video game market, lent some credibility to its report. While it would seem odd that Nintendo would stop production before it has another console ready to go, if demand isn't there, producing more inventory might not make much sense.

2016 is potentially the end of the road for the Wii U.

Nintendo is going to end production of its latest home console, according to a report from Japanese newspaper Nikkei although the hardware manufacturer told Japanese site It Media this is not an official announcement. This will essentially put the struggling system out of its misery as the gaming company shifts from Wii U and the aging 3DS handheld to mobile games (like Miitomo) and its upcoming dedicated NX device. The report goes on to say (as translated by gaming analyst Serkan Toto of Kantan Games) that Nintendo has already stopped making certain Wii U accessories. This makes sense. The Wii U has fallen far behind its Microsoft and Sony competition despite having a one-year headstart. In a gaming industry worth \$99.3 billion, Nintendo doesn't want to give up any more ground while putting money into a sinking platform.

GamesBeat has reached out to Nintendo for comment. While the company's American division has not yet responded, a spokesperson did tell IT Media that this is not an announcement from the company and Nintendo plans to continue production through the next fiscal period and beyond. We've also requested that Nintendo clarify that translation because fiscal period could refer to the next quarter from April through July or the entire 12-month period of April through March.

The Nikkei report, however, claims that Nintendo will fully announce the NX this year, which is something the company has said in the past. But ending Wii U production suggests Nintendo could potentially launch the successor this year. We've seen lots of evidence pointing to a 2016 launch for the NX, and this is just the latest piece on that pile.

As for the Wii U, 2016 is only its fourth year on the market. Microsoft's original Xbox and Sega's Dreamcast are the only other major console release to have such stunted runs. Like with those systems, Nintendo never established the Wii U as a viable platform for the mass market. The company set it apart with its odd tablet-like controller, but that and everything else about it felt a step behind products from Apple, Microsoft, and Sony.

Quickly after the Wii U debuted, third-party publishers like Electronic Arts reportedly sent back their Wii U development kits. This led to a machine that primarily existed to play Nintendo first-party games.

The Wii U does have some standout hits. Super Mario 3D World is one of the best platforming games ever. Splatoon is an exciting, hip new shooter that shows Nintendo now understands online multiplayer. Mario Kart 8 is probably the best entry in that series. Bayonetta 2 is one of the finest action games ever made. And Super Mario Maker is an incredible experience that won GamesBeat's Game of the Year awards in 2015.

Looking ahead, the Wii U still has a few noteworthy releases coming this year. Star Fox: Zero hits April 22. Paper Mario: Color Splash also has a 2016 release date. But, of course, the most anticipated game is The Legend of Zelda. Nintendo has delayed that action-adventure hit a few times, but it has most recently said that it will come out for Wii U in 2016. But it also seems more

likely than ever that the game could also end up simultaneously coming out for the NX, which is something fans have speculated about for the last year.

Regardless of when production ends or what happens with Zelda, the Wii U will have a murky legacy. It is clearly one of Nintendo's greatest failures, but it also has some truly wonderful games. And while it seems primed to have a quick exit, I don't regret buying mine.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online - Online Users Growl & Purr!

Atari Vault Launches With 100 Games, Controller Support, and Online Features

Earlier this year, Atari announced a 100-game bundle for PC, and now this Atari Vault has just gone live. For those who want to relive their blocky childhood gaming memories, this is the most convenient method of doing so without resorting to emulators or retro consoles. And if that's not enough, the collection also adds online features and full controller support. Titles from the dawn of gaming have been released in various formats over the years, and it appears that the nostalgia factor is still strong enough for further releases and re-releases.

The bundle is now available on Steam, as confirmed by an official post. 100 games from the 1970s and 80s are included, with the list encompassing Pong, Centipede, Asteroids, Missile Command, Gravitar, Breakout, Warlords, Tempest, Yars Revenge, Haunted House, Joust, Pitfall, Q*Bert, Berzerk, Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back, Frogger, Pole Position, and 83 more. Note that all the included titles come from Atari itself. You can choose the game via virtual 3D arcade cabinets or 3D Atari VCS/2600 original box art.

Atari Vault's online features are explained in the post: Challenge your friends in your rec room or compete with arcade champs from around the world with local and online multiplayer. Show the world you're the best Centipede (or Basic Math) player alive with global online Steam Leaderboards!

You can dive into nostalgia via keyboard and mouse, Steam controller, or any other compatible controller. For a real trip back in time, plug in a trackball or 2600-style joystick. Beyond the games, you can explore game manuals and marketing materials.

Atari Vault is available for download for \$17, which sounds like a lot for some old games, but then again you're paying just 17 cents for each. And sure, there are other ways to get your old-school gaming fix, but with the added features and controller

support, this isn't a bad bargain at all.

Bandit Gaming - Castlevania Coming to Atari 2600

Konami never brought Castlevania to the Atari 2600. That is not stopping fans though. While this is a work in progress, an early one at that, it is impressive already. This is definitely shaping up to be an interesting homebrew release, from the music to the graphics as they stand. This is a must see.

Castlevania was one of the seminal Konami titles during the 8 and 16-bit era. In North America if you wanted to play this game, you had to own a Nintendo console. Sure, Sega got one game - Bloodlines, which was better than the SNES Super Castlevania IV. Nintendo's Super Nintendo went on to get at least one more official Castlevania title (it was common for Sega to get snubbed by 3rd parties like this).

Atari's 2600 was still receiving games when the Nintendo Entertainment System was receiving Castlevania games but Konami chose to show no love to it. This was probably due to the way the contracts with Nintendo were set up- companies could release their NES games on computers but not competing consoles for a specific period of time.

While there are obviously creative freedoms being taken with this fan port, it is still apparent to fans- this is Castlevania on the Atari 2600. The graphical and audio cues are there even if the little details are lost- such as peeling paint on the walls.

Obviously there will probably not be a release of this game on cartridge, which would require money to be transferred. This would definitely raise the ire of Konami and get the project shut down. The likelihood this title would see an official release is quite low but not non-existent.

In the meantime, Castlevania fans have plenty of official content to enjoy, even if Konami has stopped making new games. Ebay is a great resource for getting decent prices on Castlevania games. We will follow the development of the 2600 port as it continues.

Shadow of the Colossus Atari 2600 Revived After Hardware Crash

A while back I covered the Atari 2600 port of Shadow of the Colossus by AtariAge member, Ultima . Since I last covered Shadow of the Colossus for the Atari 2600 there has been a hardware crash that cost Ultima all of his previous code. Since then he has gone back to the drawing board and reworked everything based on memory along with improvements. What is here now is quite interesting.

Shadow of the Colossus for the Playstation 2, and HD remake for the PS3, was all about the giant monsters. On those platforms Shadow was 3D and quite visually impressive. On the Atari 2600

though, 99.99% of the stuff that made Colossus the success on those platforms is kind of gone. Not a chance in hell that the Atari 2600 would be able to compete with a Playstation 2, let alone the Playstation 3 HD remake version.

Ultima has his work cut out for him, for sure. Visually, the essence of Shadow of the Colossus is slowly appearing in this port. There are multiple screens, a sword attack and the horse from the original. I am not sure if I ran into any of the Colossi in this video but I kept running into white creatures that teleported me back to another screen.

So far the Atari 2600 port of Shadow of the Colossus, while not complete, fits in less than 20KB of space. That is minuscule by today's standards. Just the text from this article is bigger than that.

As this develops I will be doing my best to keep you updated here on Retro Gaming Magazine. The last update (in the video) was posted on December 20th, so very recently. We may see another update soon but I doubt it due to the holidays. If one comes available I will make sure to update it here on RGM.

Previous updates are covered here on RGM and in the AtariAge thread.

Bandit Gaming Super Mario Bros Texas Instruments 99/4a Port

Okay, Nintendo shot down Princess Rescue on the Atari 2600. That has not stopped other fans from porting Super Mario Bros to other platforms. One such platform is the Texas Instruments 99/4a computer. What we have here is obviously not an official port but a pretty interesting fan creation.

Okay, before we go too far - who the hell knew the Texas Instruments 99/4a could do this? My next question is, why haven't these abilities of the hardware been promoted more? Okay, I got my disbelief out of the way.

There are some liberties that have been taken in this fan port. For one, the backgrounds are currently swappable. There are the original backgrounds that are one plane moving with the level. There is also the option to swap them out for backgrounds that mix Super Mario World with Super Mario Bros in a cool mashup. Other liberties that have been taken focus more on Mario himself. When grabbing the fire power plant, there is no slight pause as Mario changes. It is just instant.

What is here in this fan port is quite interesting. This is almost a carbon copy of Super Mario Bros running on the Texas Instruments 99/4a. Take into consideration that this is a fan working in their spare time and it is even more awesome.

The music seems slightly slower than in the Nintendo NES original too. There is no sound effect in place for breaking blocks. When hit as big Mario, it is nearly instant that he becomes small again. There is no transition animation, yet.

There is a high chance that Nintendo will shoot this developer a cease and desist letter when it comes closer to completion. This could probably be avoided if the developer continues just releasing it for free, rather than selling it on cartridge (like Prince's Rescue was).

Mario is a big man in gaming and there are a ton of official releases. This port to the Texas Instruments 99/4a is chronicled over on AtariAge. Head over to Ebay and grab any copies of those elusive Mario games you don't already own.

Colecovision - We Would Like Your Opinions on Specs

Ok. We get it. Atari Age users are the gurus at Hardware and Emulation.

Everyone is asking for the Minis. We do need your help.

Our goal is to create a Mini that is similar in size and quality as the mini's from the 80s. The goal here would be to have each mini focus on one featured game (for EXAMPLE only: Say its Ms. Pac Man on one unit, Donkey Kong on another etc.), then each unit may have a few other games on the system as well, but they would not be featured on the side stickers, and only mentioned on the box art.

Please feel free to give your opinion on the technical specification of the Mini's that you would suggest. Screen type and size, emulators, hardware, platform or any other specs that you think we should consider. The more specific the better.

LET'S do this as a team!...

Keep in mind that we would like to keep the quality of the plastic high as well as having a mid range quality on the guts of the machine. BUT, at the same time, we would need to be able to have a retail price point that consumers would be interested in. (And while we are at it, you may as well give us an idea of what you would expect to pay for a mini).

Any other advice would be appreciated.

This is our first thread, and we are hoping to keep up with responses the best that we can!

You can also give your opinion on the same topic on our facebook page.

SCUMM Co-creator Digs Up Game Design Treasure Trove

After spending his career at Atari, LucasArts, 3DO, and Microsoft, veteran programmer Aric Wilmunder has amassed a

treasure trove of design documents, and now he's going to share them with the world.

Although he might not be a household name, Wilmunder has worked on some of the industry's most adored, critically-acclaimed releases, including *Monkey Island*, *Day of the Tentacle*, *Maniac Mansion*, *The Dig*, and *Indy Iron Phoenix*.

Most of those titles have been out for decades, but Wilmunder is giving us a chance to turn back the clock and dig into the design techniques of yesteryear by uploading a whole catalog of tantalizingly detailed design documents.

"Years ago I visited the LucasArts facility in the San Francisco Presidio and brought along two grocery bags of design documents," wrote Wilmunder, on his personal website.

"I asked if they had an archivist and I was told that since I had kept these safe for over two decades, it was best if I just kept them together.

"I have met with the archivist at Stanford and these documents will either end up there or at a museum dedicated to preserving game design. Until then, I plan to release a few documents every month."

Scanning and uploading the documents will be a gradual process, but there's already a healthy pile available for viewing right here.

What's more, in the interest of preservation, Wilmunder is also planning on using GitHub to archive the SCUMM source code.

SCUMM, or "Script Creation Utility for Maniac Mansion", is the video game engine behind some of the most memorable games ever made, such as *Full Throttle*, *Day of the Tentacle* and *Sam & Max Hit the Road*.

Wilmunder coded the original version of SCUMM alongside Chip Morningstar and Ron Gilbert in 1987. You can hear his account of how the legendary engine was born right here on Gamasutra.

Atari Founder Nolan Bushnell Thinks VR Gaming Will Bring Arcades Back

In the early 1960s, Nolan Bushnell worked at an amusement park to help put himself through college, where he studied electrical engineering. That seemingly inconsequential side job set into motion a course of events that would vastly reshape the interactive-media landscape across the world.

It was my game MBA, Bushnell, the founder of Atari and Chuck E. Cheese's, told International Business Times. I knew the economics of the coin-operated game business. And so in some ways it was an accident in space and time that I was the only electrical engineer who played on video computers and, at the same time, understood the arcade business.

Combining his knowledge of arcade amusements with the emerging field of computers, Bushnell went on to develop Computer Space, the first coin-operated video game, released 45 years ago this summer. The endeavor ultimately led to the founding of Atari Inc. at the dawn of the home video game revolution. Today, the gaming industry is bigger than Hollywood, and next year, revenue from games is projected to reach \$107 billion worldwide, according to the Global Games Market Report.

IBT spoke with Bushnell here at the South by Southwest interactive conference, where he was on hand as part of the Tech for Humanity series hosted by the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, or IEEE. Bushnell gave a talk on the future of out-of-home entertainment, joined by three of his eight children: his sons Brent and Tyler and his daughter Alissa.

All four of them are still pushing the industry forward in some way, and with advances in virtual reality, augmented reality and sensor technology, they say arcades — or some variation of them — are due for a comeback. (Brent runs the Los Angeles-based Two Bit Circus, which produces interactive, amusement park-like shows complete with robots, lasers and racing simulators. And Tyler recently launched a successful Kickstarter campaign to create a retro arcade game that you can mount to your wall.)

At 73, Bushnell is both philosophical and professorial, with a full white beard and rich speaking voice that adds weight to everything he says. And he had a lot to say about the past, present and future of the industry he helped create.

Pong An Atari Super Pong retro console is seen at the 2014 Gamescom gaming trade fair in Cologne, Germany. Photo: Sascha Steinbach/Getty Images

International Business Times: There's a whole industry now based around people watching other people play video games. Is that something you ever thought would happen when you first got into this?

Nolan Bushnell: No, I didn't. Somehow there were a couple of things that were not on my radar screen, and one of them was that your mobile telephone was going to be a game platform. Somehow I didn't perceive that, because that was a time when mobile phones were like a brick. And then the idea of watching someone else play a video game — that was not part of my reality early on, but later on I started thinking it would be.

IBT: Obviously, Twitch is the big platform that brought it mainstream in a lot of people's eyes. Do you think it adds to or subtracts from the video game experience when you have a group of people who aren't participating but just watching?

Bushnell: I think it's helpful. I think they're watching to get strategies. These games are getting very complex. When you see somebody executing well, it's like a kid on the sandlot seeing a really good play in football. I see it as part of the training aspect, but also aspirational: Oh, I can do that. Whenever you can create a dream for a lot of people, that dream is good enough itself. People play the lottery not because they think they're going to win, but because they can dream about winning.

IBT: We're coming up on 45 years since Computer Space, which was the first coin-operated video game. What did you think that was going to be when you first decided it was something you were going to create?

Bushnell: I always had this attitude about evolving technology, and I felt that I was nothing more than being the deliverer of cost to the coin-op business. I played games in the big computer centers the minute they had screens attached.

IBT: At what point did you realize this was going to be something that people would bring into their homes and hook up to their TVs?

Bushnell: Right from the outset. I knew that would happen as soon as the costs would allow it.

IBT: From my perspective, I'm 45, the Atari 2600 was pretty much was my childhood. Did you know it was going to be this kind of phenomenon that would define a generation's experience with media.

Bushnell: I actually have to give credit to [Pong designer] Allan Alcorn for that. We talked a lot about home games, and one day he came in and said, I think I can put Pong on a chip, and I've got the guy who can do it.

IBT: I was always perplexed by the decision to package it with just one video game, which was Combat. How did that decision happen?

Bushnell: We just did a little bit of research and we found out that was the game people liked to play the most. That was actually one of my many million-dollar mistakes.

IBT: The Combat thing?

Bushnell: No, the fact that we launched the product with eight cartridges, and I felt that we would sell an average of three cartridges per unit. What we didn't know is that the early buyers would buy all the cartridges. And so we had a whole bunch of players out there who only had the Combat cartridge.

IBT: So you underestimated the demand?

Bushnell: Massively.

IBT: What do you think of the gaming industry today?

Bushnell: I don't think you can talk about it as the gaming industry anymore. There are gaming industries, and they're all as different as cheese and chalk.

SXSW cube A welcome sign is seen at the SXSW festival, which celebrated its 30th anniversary this year. Photo: Christopher Zara/International Business Times

IBT: What do you think when you see stuff like Gamergate scandal? It was a big issue this year at South By. All of this somehow ties into gaming, and videogame reviews, and harassment of women online. What do you think about that aspect of the culture?

Bushnell: I think bad behavior is always going to be with us. In the gaming business, or in anything.

IBT: Do you think that we'll see a return to the arcade era?

Bushnell: From a big standpoint, the arcade was the birthing place where technology from the labs was made available to the public before it could be priced appropriately for the home. And I think that the arcade has failed for almost 20 years. When there was a parity in the graphic resolution of the home and the graphic resolution in public, all of a sudden the arcade said, Gee, why are we here?

IBT: The challenge is getting people out of their houses and off their phones. How do you do that with an arcade in 2016?

Bushnell: You do things that aren't possible in the home yet. Right now, VR and AR aren't ready for the home.

IBT: You think there are going to be VR arcades?

Bushnell: We're building them right now ... What I want to say, too, is that gaming as an educational platform is just in its infancy. I think that we're going to be able to accelerate learning at unprecedented speeds. There's no reason that college should take four years and high school should take four years. I think all of it could be at least cut in half.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Get Terrorism Off The Internet? It's (Still) Not So Simple

Since this week's mass murder in Brussels yet another terrorist attack launched by locals, not foreigners people have again been asking a simple question: Why do we allow the authors of such atrocities to keep recruiting people online?

The most public and extreme expression of that came in December, when Republican frontrunner Donald Trump said he'd support closing the Internet up in some way to shut out terrorist groups like the Daesh death-cult that pretends it's an Islamic State.

Democratic candidates Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders recognize that you can't actually build a wall in the Internet. But after Brussels, they too called out the importance of stopping terrorist recruitment online.

Social networks aren't just sitting around

It's not as if the major U.S. social networks have been idle. In February, Twitter announced on its own blog that it had suspended over 125,000 accounts for threatening or promoting terrorist acts, primarily related to ISIS.

That post went on to explain that the company had increased its staff devoted to the issue and had begun combining reviews of suspicious accounts with automated scrutiny to find others like them.

Has that made a difference? A February study published by George Washington University's Program on Extremism found that this campaign was not a futile Whack-A-Mole game; as Daesh/ISIS supporters came back online with new accounts, they found fewer followers.

Facebook, in turn, has tightened its community standards to ban even condoning terrorism, and now has five offices around the world devoted to monitoring and taking down terrorist content.

At a panel discussion yesterday on the responsibilities of tech companies vis a vis terrorists, the Software & Information Industry Association's public-policy vice president, Mark MacCarthy, commended the zero tolerance rules at Twitter and Facebook for terrorist recruitment. These policies are proving to be reasonably effective, he said.

Another panel member, Google public-policy counsel Alexandria Walden, said that company's YouTube service takes action on 100,000 videos a day that violate its community standards.

Beyond the fact that blocking access from an entire country as Trump has called for is nearly impossible if you don't occupy it first (and it's still not easy afterwards), State Department special advisor Jason Pielemeier observed that such a move would risk cutting off some of our own intelligence sources: It might also block human rights activists who are trying to document atrocities.

He added: There are parts of the government that are very concerned about taking this stuff off the Internet where it's visible and can be tracked.

Filtering out the filth of Daesh propaganda automatically would be even harder, and in some cases could lead to evidence of atrocities going unseen.

This sort of screening and erasure of content would violate the First Amendment if the government ordered it. But Twitter, Facebook, and Google's platforms are private spaces, and they get to set the rules for who gets to post things there for free.

The second half of this discussion often goes something like this: How can America, the superpower of advertising and marketing, win this battle of ideas?

Early attempts at such countermessaging have gone over as well as most government propaganda (which is to say not very well at all). More recently, Washington has been seeking the help of private industry in Silicon Valley, Hollywood and Madison Avenue.

But effective marketing requires knowing your target market.

At Wednesday's panel, Emma Llansó, who runs the Center for Democracy and Technology's Free Expression Project, said she doubted that any such Madison Valleywood Project would look very authentic or credible.

The most effective counterspeech is likely to come from people with similar backgrounds as the targets of radicalization efforts say, an imam who doesn't subscribe to Daesh's abhorrent distortion of Islam. But keeping people off the Internet because they tweet from a certain area or about certain topics risks silencing those positive contributions.

(Remember that most of Daesh's victims are themselves Muslim. Over this month, Daesh-linked attacks in Ankara and Istanbul killed more people than in Brussels.)

A more recent government program, as outlined in a Daily Beast post by Kimberly Dozier, would identify those authentic voices and channel technical help and funding towards them. That might work better as long as the intended audience doesn't then see those counterspeakers as U.S. puppets.

The Internet isn't really the issue anyway

As a deeper read of coverage about the Brussels atrocities should make clear, our bigger problem remains not piecing together clues that were already in hand. It's starting to look like Belgian investigators didn't follow up on leads they had, just as French police missed hints about the Paris attacks, and U.S. authorities did the same with clues prior to the 9/11 attacks.

And yes, it does not help our cause when political candidates who probably couldn't name the five pillars of the Islamic faith announce that Muslims represent a collective risk. No discussion of radicalization can ignore that factor.

But there's a rich history of politicians suggesting the Internet and the tools we use on it represent a primary explanation for real-world problems see, for instance, blaming encrypted phones and communication for making the Paris and San Bernardino attacks possible. We invented all this stuff, the arguments go; why can't we just tell the nerds to think harder, flip the right switches and make the issue go away?

France Fines Google Over 'Right To Be Forgotten'

The French data protection authority said it has fined Google 100,000 euros (\$111,720) for not scrubbing web search results widely enough in response to a European privacy ruling.

The only way for Google to uphold the Europeans' right to privacy was by delisting inaccurate results popping up under name searches across all its websites, the Commission Nationale de l'Informatique et des Libertés (CNIL) said in a statement on Thursday.

In May 2014 the European Court of Justice ruled that people could ask search engines, such as Google and Microsoft's Bing , to remove inadequate or irrelevant information from web results appearing under searches for people's names - dubbed the "right to be forgotten".

The U.S. Internet giant has been at odds with European Union data protection authorities over the territorial scope of the ruling.

Google complied, but it only scrubbed results across its European websites such as Google.de in Germany and Google.fr in France on the grounds that to do otherwise would have a chilling effect on the free flow of information.

In May last year the CNIL ordered Google to expand its application of the ruling to all its domains, including Google.com, because of the ease of switching from a European domain to Google.com.

"Contrary to Google's statements, applying delisting to all of the extensions does not curtail freedom of expression insofar as it does not entail any deletion of content from the Internet," the CNIL said.

A spokesman for Google, now a unit of holding company Alphabet Inc, said the company had worked hard to implement the "right to be forgotten ruling thoughtfully and comprehensively in Europe."

"But as a matter of principle, we disagree with the CNIL's assertion that it has the authority to control the content that people can access outside France, and we plan to appeal their ruling," Al Verney, Google's spokesman, said.

The company did try to assuage the regulator's concerns in February by delisting search results across all its websites - including Google.com - when accessed from the country where the request came from.

That meant that if a German resident asks Google to de-list a link popping up under searches for his or her name, the link will not be visible on any version of Google's website, including Google.com, when the search engine is accessed from Germany.

But the CNIL rejected that approach, saying that a person's right to privacy could not depend on the "geographic origin of those viewing the search results."

"Only delisting on all of the search engine's extensions, regardless of the extension used or the geographic origin of the person performing the search, can effectively uphold this right," it said.

Microsoft 'Deeply Sorry' for Tay Chatbot

A Microsoft executive said Friday that the company was deeply sorry for the unintended offensive and hurtful tweets the company's Tay chatbot delivered earlier this week.

Tay is now offline and we'll look to bring Tay back only when we are confident we can better anticipate malicious intent that conflicts with our principles and values, Peter Lee, the corporate vice president in charge of Microsoft Research, wrote in a blog post.

While that echoes the message that Microsoft delivered earlier, Lee attempted to show how Tay wasn't simply unleashed onto the Internet without preparation. Tay was the outgrowth of a similar Microsoft chatbot known as XiaoIce, which is already delighting 40 million people in China, Lee explained.

The great experience with XiaoIce led us to wonder: Would an AI like this be just as captivating in a radically different cultural environment? Lee wrote. Tay - a chatbot created for 18- to 24-year-olds in the U.S. for entertainment purposes is our first attempt to answer this question.

Why this matters: Lee's disclosure that Microsoft has already released a chatbot that 40 million Chinese people are using with civility makes the Tay debacle even more humiliating for the western world. Microsoft and Lee are clearly embarrassed, but it's difficult to tell whether they're ashamed of their own failure, or of the audience that abused Tay's algorithm. Perhaps there's a lesson here: Social constructs have to be thought of in terms of social vulnerabilities in the same way software must be constructed with security exploits in mind.

Just one of the bizarre tweets issued by the Tay chatbot from Microsoft.

Tay's troubled past

Lee wrote that Tay had been developed with filtering built in, and had been tested with diverse user groups. We stress-tested Tay under a variety of conditions, specifically to make interacting with Tay a positive experience, Lee wrote.

Tay's platforms included Qik and Twitter, and the latter platform became the true test for Tay's maturity. Within 24 hours of coming online, Lee wrote that Tay had been subject to a coordinated attack by a subset of people.

Although we had prepared for many types of abuses of the system, we had made a critical oversight for this specific attack, Lee wrote. As a result, Tay tweeted wildly inappropriate and reprehensible words and images. We take full responsibility for not seeing this possibility ahead of time.

Lee didn't say how the attack worked, specifically, but many believe that by asking the Tay bot to repeat after me, Tay would not only parrot the phrase but also learn it, and incorporate it into her vocabulary.

Lee wrote that Microsoft sees Tay as a research effort, and that AI systems feed off both positive and negative interactions with people. The problem, of course, is how Microsoft will reintroduce Tay publicly, with the risk that the same vulnerability, or a different one, may be used to offend others.

To do AI right, one needs to iterate with many people and often in public forums, Lee wrote. We must enter each one with great caution and ultimately learn and improve, step by step, and to do this without offending people in the process.

And right now, Microsoft doesn't seem to have a ready answer.

Facebook Tests Tool That Identifies Fake Accounts

Facebook, Twitter and other social media networks have been battling the issue of fake accounts for quite some time, but Facebook may gain some serious ground in this fight soon. The company could score some big points with both users and advertisers with the tool it's in the process of pushing out to everyone.

According to Mashable, Facebook's new tool notifies users when it detects a fake account set up by someone who may be impersonating them. When the tool identifies such an account, it alerts the user. To identify these fake accounts, the feature looks at the profile pictures and names. Upon receiving the alert that someone may be impersonating them, users are asked to say whether the profile is a fake one meant to impersonate them using their personal information.

All the notifications for this feature automated, but a Facebook team reviews all the profiles it flags as potentially impersonating accounts. The social network started testing the tool in November and has pushed it out to accounts in approximately 75% of the world, said Mashable. Facebook intends to expand it soon, the website reported, citing Antigone Davis, the social network's Global Safety Head.

According to Mashable, impersonating people isn't a widespread problem, but it is a source of harassment. Women in particular have been reporting problems with harassment, Davis told the tech website. This issue has received quite a lot of attention in the media, particularly in cases involving public figures like reporters or politicians, some of whom have received death threats on the network. On Facebook, the issue is a bit different though.

It's a real point of concern for some women in certain regions of the world where it [impersonation] may have certain cultural or social ramifications, Davis told Mashable, adding that the impersonation tool is aimed at helping women feel safer using Facebook.

One thing Mashable doesn't point out about this new tool is its implications for advertisers as well. Identifying and eliminating fake accounts can increase the returns on their investments because it means that more real users are seeing their ads. It seems that this isn't the focus of the impersonation tool, and certainly it shouldn't be because user safety is more important. Benefiting advertisers seems to be just a sort of bonus. Of note, Twitter launched a tool in 2014 that aims to identify bot accounts, which can be used for everything from slander to

spreading misinformation or malware.

In 2014, Facebook reported in a regulatory filing that up to 137 million accounts might be fake, with the percentage range being given as between 5.5% and 11.2% of accounts. At the time, the social network had about 1.23 billion users. It's unclear whether it is making progress on this front, but the new feature should help.

Mashable also reports that two additional safety features are being tested on Facebook as well. One involves new ways to report intimate photos that were posted without a user's consent, and the other is described as a photo checkup feature.

The social network banned the posting of intimate photos without a user's consent in 2012, but Mashable describes the goal of Facebook in rolling out the feature tweak as making it more compassionate for victims of abuse. The tweak enables users to not only report a photo as inappropriate but also say that they are in the photo.

After that, outside links will appear so that users can find support groups for victims of abuse or see potential legal actions they might pursue. Of course the feature will also trigger the internal review that already occurs when someone reports a potentially inappropriate photo. According to Mashable, they're happy with the results of their tests on this tweak so far, but they still want more information before making it available more widely.

The photo checkup tool walks Facebook users through their privacy settings for their photos and explains who can see them in a fashion similar to the privacy dinosaur. Currently this tool is available to users in India, South America, Southeast Asia and Africa.

Microsoft Monday: Xbox One Price Drop, Windows 10 Upgrade Problems, Apology For Afterparty Dancers

Microsoft Monday takes a look back at the past week of news related to Microsoft. This week, Microsoft Monday includes details about HERE Maps being discontinued, a Reddit thread going viral about the problems associated with the automatic upgrade of Windows 10, Sony's response to the Xbox One cross-network feature, the HoloLens team highlighting the capabilities of Actiongram, the possibility of a 64 person party chat on the Xbox, Windows 10 Mobile being rolled out to older devices, the Xbox One price drop as part of the Spring Sale, the progress of Cortana for Xbox One, the extension of Windows 7 and Windows 8.1 support on Skylake-based PCs, support for Windows 10 apps in the Xbox One coming in several months, Microsoft's apology for the scantily-clad dancers at the Game Developers Conference afterparty and more.

HERE recently announced in a blog post that it will be removing the HERE branded apps from the Windows 10 store on March 29, 2016 and the development of apps for Windows Phone 8 will be limited to

critical bug fixes.

In the last few months, we made the HERE apps compatible with Windows 10 by using a workaround that will no longer be effective after June 30, 2016. To continue offering the HERE apps for Windows 10 would require us to redevelop the apps from the ground up, a scenario that led to the business decision to remove our apps from the Windows 10 store, said Pino Bonetti, the social media lead of HERE.

The HERE apps will no longer work on Windows 10 mobile devices after June 30, 2016. And the HERE apps will be removed from the Windows 10 store on March 29th. Google Maps is not available on Windows phones so HERE Maps was an essential app for that platform.

HERE was actually a division of Nokia, but it was sold to a consortium of German automotive companies including Audi, BMW and Daimler AG, according to Business Insider. HERE is also known for selling geographic data to technology companies like Facebook and Amazon. HERE is recommending Windows 10 phone users to rely on the Windows Maps app instead, which is powered by HERE Maps data. Recommended by Forbes

Fortunately, Microsoft has a plan to make up for the removal of the HERE app. A Microsoft employee wrote on a Reddit post that there is an exciting update planned for the Windows 10 Maps app. The update will include an improved driving mode which will be available for Windows 10 testers first.

There is a Reddit thread with over 5,100 up votes and 3,000 comments about the problems users are having with the automatic Windows 10 upgrade. A computer repair shop employee said that the business has been receiving calls all week from doctor's offices, dental practices, B&Bs and roofing companies that were hit by the automatic upgrade and it's a mess.

Microsoft seemed to downplay the issue by releasing this statement via HotHardware:

We shared in late October on the Windows Blog, we are committed to making it easy for our Windows 7 and Windows 8.1 customers to upgrade to Windows 10. As stated in that post, we have updated the upgrade experience to make it easier for customers to schedule a time for their upgrade to take place. Customers continue to be fully in control of their devices, and can choose to not install the Windows 10 upgrade or remove the upgrade from Windows Update (WU) by changing the WU settings.

Last week, Microsoft announced a native cross-platform play service between the Xbox One and Windows 10 systems. This means that Xbox One and Windows 10 users will be able to use Xbox Live to play with people on different online multiplayer networks including the Sony PlayStation Plus network. What does Sony think of Microsoft's olive branch?

Sony told GameSpot that it is open to the idea of cross-console play, but it did not specifically cite Xbox Live. PlayStation has been supporting cross-platform play between PC on several software titles starting with Final Fantasy 11 on PS2 and PC

back in 2002, said Sony via GameSpot. Sony provided this statement when it was directly asked whether a partnership with Microsoft would happen.

Rocket League is the first Xbox One game that will be able to utilize the cross-platform feature. But it's worth mentioning that there is already a cross-network feature built into the PlayStation Network that allows users to play with Steam users.

Amazon's Raspberry Pi Guide Lets Coders Use Alexa

Amazon has published an online guide explaining how to access its virtual assistant Alexa via a Raspberry Pi.

The technique presents a lower-cost alternative to buying one of its Echo devices - which are not yet available outside of the US - and an incentive to gain computer skills.

The walkthrough includes access to the necessary app data and certificates in order to link the budget computer up to the tech giant's servers.

Coding experts welcomed the initiative.

The Raspberry Pi pocket-sized computer was designed by a British charity to encourage children and others to learn how to write computer programs. More than eight million units have been sold or given away.

Amazon says that users require at least the second-generation model, released in February 2015, as well as:

- a plug-in USB microphone
- a MicroSD card
- an ethernet cable
- a wi-fi wireless adapter
- a mouse, keyboard and screen

Most Raspberry Pi owners would already own most if not all of these add-ons.

The coding involved is limited to typing in sets of commands, but the guide explains the purpose of each one.

Users also need to register for an Amazon Developer Account, which they can get for free.

Rik Cross, from the UK's after-school Code Club initiative, described it as an "interesting project", but added that parents should be aware of the privacy implications involved.

"It's important to remember that this data could be captured and stored by Amazon, in the same way that any website can store the data provided," he told the BBC.

"However, with the Raspberry Pi version, communication is via a button press, and so this serves as a much more 'active' way of

interacting with the service, rather than a service that 'passively' listens to all your nearby conversations, as is the case with the Echo."

Amazon's Alexa service can be used to stream music, provide weather and news updates, create lists and answer general knowledge questions.

The online retailer was relatively late to the field - following Apple's Siri, Microsoft's Cortana and Google's Now services.

But the firm has sought to make Alexa popular by allowing third-party developers to offer the facility. An internet connection is required because Amazon's own data centres do the processing required for the voice recognition and other artificial intelligence tasks involved.

France's Invoxia became the first to take up the offer last year with Tribby, an Alexa-powered fridge speaker.

In January, a New York-based developer released a tutorial of his own explaining how a Raspberry Pi could be used to create an Echo-like device.

But Amazon's guide, which has been published on the code-sharing site Github, is likely to drive interest in the idea.

"Anything that helps people to make and create with the technology that was otherwise closed, mysterious and inaccessible seems like a good thing to me," commented Bethany Koby, co-founder of Technology Will Save Us - an education-focused start-up currently involved with the launch of another mini-computer, the Micro Bit.

"What it doesn't do is create a way for a broader 'untechy' audiences to partake - but that isn't really its intention."

Those not attracted by the idea can download an Alexa app for devices powered by Google's Android or Apple's iOS operating systems - however, the apps are restricted to US-based users at this time.

Tips for Creating Stronger Passwords

An alarming number of people use weak and ineffective passwords. Learn how you can make the most out of one of the most basic security measures online.

Just because you don't write your passwords down on a sticky note attached to your computer monitor doesn't mean you are doing everything you can to keep your online accounts secure. You might think your passwords are a secret, but unfortunately there is a good chance that they are not.

According to recent studies on data breaches, password hacks occur frequently and they are often successful. That's because many people use simple passwords that may seem strong to them, but are actually very easy to crack using brute force methods (in

which a hacker will repeatedly try different common password combinations until one works).

One study, conducted by cyber security company Imperva, found that some of the most common passwords are Password and 123456 , as well as other similar variations. Obviously, these are quite easy to guess, and would be among the first inputted by anyone who is trying to access your account.

All it takes is one weak password guarding an online banking account, or an email account, and you could find your finances and digital life compromised in minutes. With that in mind, let's look at some tips to create strong passwords.

In one sense, preventing hackers from using brute force techniques on your online accounts is a matter of simple math. If your password is longer, there is a lower chance that anyone will be able to guess all of the correct characters in the right order.

Unfortunately, many people don't bother to create longer passwords. Imperva estimates that about 30 percent of users choose passwords with six characters or less. This is even worse when you realize that almost 60 percent of users create these passwords by using a limited variety of characters.

At a minimum, a password should be at least eight characters long, though in many cases 12 characters is preferable. It should also contain at least four different types of characters such as upper case and lower case letters, numbers and punctuation.

One obvious problem with creating a series of complex passwords is that they can be hard to remember. This is the reason why so many people are tempted to use names or other short passwords in the first place. However, there are other, better ways to accomplish this.

For instance, security expert Bruce Schneir told PC World that many people find it useful to turn common sentences into complex passwords. The phrase, Now I lay me down to sleep can be turned into nilmDOWN2s. This password would be easy enough for a user to remember, but difficult for someone to guess using brute force tactics.

The best part is, you could feel safe writing down the sentence as a reminder.

For many people, a password is the only thing that stands in the way of a data breach and identity theft. But a strong password can be a formidable defense, especially if it is used in conjunction with other protective measures.

For the best protection, consumers should consider signing up for a credit monitoring service that can alert you to certain activity on your credit file that may be indicative of fraud.

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